



## **Supporting vulnerable children, young people and families during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.**

### **Guidance from the Government**

The guidance and expectations from the government for Local Authorities to support our children, young people and families are becoming clearer on a daily basis.

The Government has been publishing guidance about supporting vulnerable children since March for local authorities and this was last updated on 19th April 2020. It includes a number of frequently asked questions and is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>

The guidance on supporting vulnerable children states that local authorities, nurseries, schools, special schools, colleges and other training providers should undertake a risk assessment to establish the individual needs of each child or young person with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. This assessment should incorporate the views of the child or young person and their parents. This will inform the decision about whether they should continue in school or college, or whether their needs can be met at home safely.

If needs are best met at schools or settings, support is to be provided, wherever possible. For those on SEN support, schools, colleges and local authorities have discretion to use the same risk judgement to decide whether home or school is the safest setting for these children. It is, however, important that as many children as possible remain at home during this time in order to help reduce transmission rates.

On 19 March 2020, the Government introduced new legislation into Parliament, in the form of the Coronavirus Bill. This bill received Royal Assent to become an Act of Law on 25th March 2020.

Through the Act, in order to balance the needs of this vulnerable group to receive the support they need with managing the demands on local authorities and health bodies to respond to this outbreak, the Act has included temporary emergency powers to modify the legal requirements on local authorities in fulfilling their duties in relation to EHC plans.

In practice, this means that where a local authority is, because of the outbreak, unable, for example, to put in place stated provision, they will need to use their reasonable endeavours to do this, but won't be penalised for failing to meet the existing duty as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. These emergency powers will only be exercised for the shortest period and where necessary, and will be regularly reviewed.

The Government has since also produced further guidance specifically to families regarding the Coronavirus outbreak and education which can be found at the links below;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

[https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-your-childrens-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19?utm\\_source=cab989cd-0d5a-4ac7-9145-6445159c785f&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-your-childrens-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19?utm_source=cab989cd-0d5a-4ac7-9145-6445159c785f&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

### **Action Taken by Derbyshire County Council**

We realise that the impact of these extraordinary circumstances on this group of children, young people and their families can be particularly acute.

By working together across the council and with providers and families, we can endeavour to ensure that children and young people with SEND receive the support they need during this difficult time. Derbyshire has taken a number of actions listed below in order to do this;

- Childrens Services Directors across Education and Social Care meet daily through remote means to address all guidance received from the government and monitor what this means for children across the county
- A business continuity group meets three times weekly through remote means to bring together leaders from all aspects of service provision across the county council and coordinate a countywide response
- Senior leaders across all education services meet three times weekly to update each other on matters within their areas and find joint solutions to any challenges that arise
- Senior leaders within the Learning, Access and Inclusion department meet on a weekly basis to address and discuss any matters relating directly to the remote support being offered to schools and settings.
- A weekly meeting with head teachers from special schools takes place to discuss any monitor and support the offer for children within vulnerable groups and those of key workers in this sector. This has been particularly useful to discuss and address common challenges.
- A risk mitigation process was begun across all settings at the end of March to enable the local authority to gather information from settings about risk assessments they have completed for all children who are supported by an Education Health and Care Plan. Through this process each child has been allocated a key worker from within the sector to monitor their individual circumstances. After this process was begun in Derbyshire, guidance to implement such a process throughout the country has been provided by the Department for Education and can be found below;

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance?utm\\_source=85366434-8f36-405e-ae28-d4f50f8d3e0c&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance?utm_source=85366434-8f36-405e-ae28-d4f50f8d3e0c&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

- Guidance for young people regarding social distancing has been developed through our Educational Psychology Service with Public Health and issued. A link to the relevant page on our website is provided below. This page also includes guidance for parents and carers in how to talk to their children about coronavirus

<http://www.services.derbyshire.gov.uk/Services/2667>

- Webpages have been set up on the council website offering advice and resources to schools parents and families.

[www.derbyshire.gov.uk/schoolsandparents](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/schoolsandparents)

[www.derbyshire.gov.uk/activities](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/activities)

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social-health/health-and-wellbeing/health-protection/disease-control/coronavirus/schools/schools-parents.aspx>

- Further resources to support SEND families in the Midlands area have been added to the Local Offer website and can be found at the link below;

<https://localoffer.derbyshire.gov.uk/#!/search/list?query=coronavirus&max=30&offset=0&exact=1>

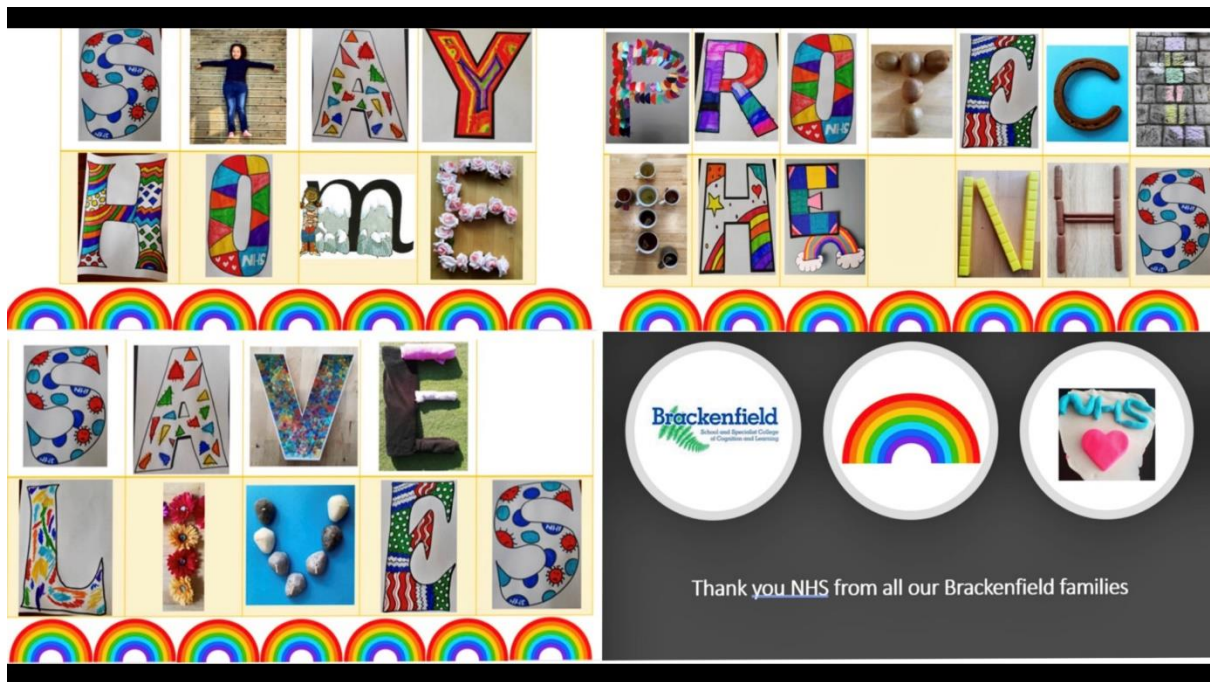
- Parents are able to contact the council through Call Derbyshire for any individual queries which are then directed to the most appropriate agency to answer their query and support their needs and further information about the Community Response Unit is available on the link below

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social-health/health-and-wellbeing/health-protection/disease-control/coronavirus/community-response-unit/if-you-need-help/if-you-need-help.aspx>

Derbyshire Parent Carer Voice, Derbyshire SEND Information and Advice Support Service and the Health Designated Clinical Officer are now in regular contact with County Council officers to address issues for families as they arise.

Thank you once again for all you are doing to support our most vulnerable children across Derbyshire at this time.

**Paula Williams | Assistant Director for Learning Access and Inclusion**



Picture created virtually by children from Brackenfield Special School working at home and in school.